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Eleven Arizona Artists to Create New Works

The Arizona Commission on the Arts awarded Artists Projects grants to 11 Arizona artists: **Rudy Adler, Liz Cohen, Julie Connick, Scott Ellegood, Angela Ellsworth, Charles Jensen, Tania Katan, Marianne Myungah Kim, Stephanie Lenox, Sean Nevin, and Erin V. Sotak.** Offered yearly, each Artists Project grant awards up to \$5,000 to artists to help them build their careers through artistic projects. The Commission received 122 applications in many artistic disciplines from around the state for the 2007 Artists Projects grants.

Artist Projects panelists included **Diane Barber**, co-director and visual arts curator of Diversework Artspace in Houston, Texas; **Jesse Manno**, composer, collaborator in many national dance, theatre, and film projects, and director of Music for the Dance Division at the University of Colorado at Boulder; **Aleida Rodriguez**, award-winning poet, non-fiction writer, and editor, who lives in Los Angeles, California; and **Lucia Sanroman**, artist and assistant curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego. **Darryl B. Dobras**, a board member of the Arizona Commission on the Arts from Tucson, chaired the panel.

Artists Projects Grant Descriptions:

Rudy Adler – *Border Film Project*. The artist, along with his collaborators, Brett Huneycutt and Victoria Criado, has distributed hundreds of disposable cameras to

undocumented migrants crossing the Sonoran desert as well as to the Minutemen, the citizen group who patrol the Arizona border trying to stop the undocumented workers. The photographs seek to show both sides of the issue of immigration, and will be shown at exhibitions around the country. Adler lives in Paradise Valley.

Panel Comments: Alder and company's Border Film Project is an ingenious grassroots effort that manages to completely reframe the immigration debate. The resulting photographs provide an unfiltered look at what is really unfolding along the U.S./Mexico border and stand in stark contrast to the way this issue has been portrayed in the media. By allowing both minutemen and migrants to tell this story, the issue takes on a different tone—focusing on the human conditions and motivations that drive people on both sides of the issue to drastic extremes.

Liz Cohen – *Desert Apocalypse*. The artist will produce an intervention/video of American war veterans recounting their experiences in Iraq as they travel up the Salt River in a boat. The video will be edited as a series of mini stories, prepared as a continuous narrative video film and will be part of an installation that will include projection, monitors, sound, and the boat. Cohen's most recent work, *Same Same But Different*, was featured at The Prague Contemporary Art Festival in 2006. She lives in Paradise Valley.

Panel Comments: Cohen's work is characterized by deep looking, exhaustive attention to detail, and startling originality. She produces top quality work—always unique, quirky, iconoclastic. With this project she will supply us with stories that are necessary, yet often go unheard.

Julie Comnick – *Navigating the Menagerie*. Exploring the “other” as equaling the “exotic” in Western culture, Comnick will create a body of paintings based on her research of eighteenth-century French wildlife menageries, exotic animal gaming and safari industries in Africa, and the modern circus in Europe and the United States. When an animal was identified as exotic, its peculiarities became desirable and were, consequently, sought by wealthy collectors. She will explore these themes by creating unexpected associations among seemingly ordinary objects. Comnick works as a studio arts faculty member at Prescott College.

Panel Comments: Comnick's vibrant, sizable, and skillfully rendered paintings include juxtapositions of subject matter that seems oddly off kilter. By combining incongruent representations of easily recognizable things—circus animals, young children, and warplanes—Comnick lures viewers into a timely conversation about what constitutes the “other” in contemporary global culture.

Scott Ellegood – *Being Perceived: Embroidered Portraiture*. The artist will continue work on exploring how people are perceived, how people see themselves, and how people interact with society by constructing their own modes of being perceived. Ellegood will digitally manipulate images, creating portraits that ultimately represent no

person specifically, walking the fine line between realism and abstraction—map-like representations that provide clues as to how the images can be read. Ellegood's work was the focus of a featured article in *Fiberarts Magazine* in 2006. He lives in Tucson.

Panel Comments: Geared more toward the abstract, the color and variations with stitching in this project is very impressive, and quite an achievement. It also is fascinating that Ellegood uses—to a wonderful effect—a craft traditionally associated with feminine practice. The grant will allow him to push the boundary through scale.

Angela Ellsworth – *Stitch Portrait Book*. In this project, the artist will create visual meditations on people she misses or longs to see, using black thread and paper napkins. The images are sewn without prior planning or an initial sketch, and each stitch is made with a direct connection to what is being remembered or seen in a photograph. Ellsworth is an assistant professor of Intermedia at the School of Arts at Arizona State University. She lives in Phoenix.

Panel Comments: Ellsworth's description makes one ask, "Can anyone really do this?!" The mark making of each stitch has a life of its own. When one sees her work the astounding character of portrayed individuals just pops right out.

Charles Jensen – *Safe*. In a book-length series of poems, Jensen will explore the impact of a close friend's murder in two sections and with different voices and perspective—from persona poems where the narrator becomes trapped emotionally in the story of the murder, thereby confusing his own identity with the victim's; to a metatext commenting on the first section of the book using the approach and language of theoretical film commentary. Jensen is the program manager at the Piper Center for Creative Writing at Arizona State University.

Panel Comments: Jensen handles the subject of a friend's murder with great restraint. This type of subject often relies on stirring our sympathies in order to appear important/weighty. Jensen understands this, and skillfully writes away from this tendency by raising the level of aesthetics. Charles Jensen clearly focuses on the artistry of his subject matter; that's what makes his proposal rise to the top.

Tania Katan – *Pragmatic Osmosis*. The writer will explore in memoir her family story, which she describes as a family of inventors: inventors of truths, realities, and relationships. While she came from a loving family, they were underachievers. This memoir will expose the underbelly of what it means to be an underachiever with high hopes. Katan received the 2006 Judy Graham Award for her nonfiction book, *My One-Night Stand with Cancer*. She lives in Phoenix.

Panel Comments: In the manner of better-known contemporary writers, Katan is humorous in a deadpan manner, making fun of life today, but her focus is completely original. Her humor is self-effacing, which makes it easy to relate to, although she makes you work as you read. There is nothing facile about her style.

Marianne Myungah Kim – *Meditations on North and South*. The artist will create an interdisciplinary project involving video documentary, interactive installation for a gallery, and a multi-media performance for stage. All three components of the project will be inspired by macro and micro events that relate to the border between North and South Korea. The project will map one woman's journey through the war that separated the countries, exploring the intimate and global strata of separation through text, movement, and video. Kim is an assistant professor in the Interdisciplinary Arts & Performance Department at Arizona State University. She lives in Phoenix.

Panel Comments: Kim's work samples showed wonderful spatial sense and character; not just in dance technique but in text and shape. What are really interesting about the works are the interactions between dancers, video, and set. We feel that it is important to support such original interdisciplinary work.

Stephanie Lenox – *The Business*. The poet will create a manuscript of work inspired by contemporary white-collar work. By taking the workplace as the subject for her poems, she aims to enlarge the discussion of what work is and how it affects us in the age of the cubicle. Lenox's poems appear in the 2006 anthology, *Best New Poets*. She lives in Tempe.

Panel Comments: Lenox skillfully uses irony to write about white-collar job complaints—as opposed to the typical whiney, flabby talk about 9 to 5 jobs. A real strength is her original ways of talking about emotions, using taut, almost sparse, language for describing what gets under her skin.

Sean Nevin – *Oblivio Gate*. The poet will be completing poems for a book entitled, *Oblivio Gate*, a meditation on the affects of Alzheimer's disease on Solomon, an aging Korean War veteran. It is not victim poetry, but a crafted exploration of the way the brain works and the way language itself breaks down. Nevin is the assistant director of the Young Writers Program at Arizona State University. He lives in Tempe.

Panel Comments: Nevin's work is very tight and well honed. No flab. His images were fresh and original. Again, he isn't relying simply on identity issues to carry the day. It was clear he wanted to write the best poem possible, period—and has done so.

Erin V. Sotak – *Squeeze*. Always interested in the concepts of voyeurism, the gaze, and objectification of what is viewed, the artist plans to explore what happens when the performance is unviewed or not fully viewed. She will create a controlled perspective, allowing the viewer only a limited access point to an image. The "unseen" but acknowledged action, removing the visual self from the performance piece, will test what it mean to witness something. Sotak is a featured artist in the new book, *Phoenix: 21st Century City*. She lives in Scottsdale.

Panel Comments: Sotak's work is almost visceral. Her description of walking into this world was indelible. One would never forget the experience—simultaneously beautiful

and very strange. These works are very strong, process-oriented, evolving pieces—and as a whole conceptually exciting.

As the state arts agency, the Commission envisions an Arizona where all people can broaden, deepen and diversify their engagement with the arts, as creators, audiences and supporters, in ways that are satisfying and integral to their lives.

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